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MARKETING GARDEN PRODUCTS IN PASSAIC COUNTY 1935 ★

U. S. Department of Agriculture

A radio talk by H. E. Wettyn, County Agricultural Agent, Passaic County, New Jersey, delivered in the Land Grant College radio program, May 15, 1935, and broadcast by a network of 50 associated NBC radio stations.

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Good afternoon! We have read of outstanding marketing projects in which counties or entire areas distant from the Eastern markets have been the means of establishing a new industry for that section. Such a project of the county agent in your own area has undoubtedly earned for him your esteem and undying appreciation but for our farmers in the East adjacent to these markets it has caused a real serious problem, for it is very easy to see that any marketing plan that carries no provisions for an increased use or consumption of the product to be marketed invariably, while it may bring relief to one section, automatically injures another. That is exactly the situation that we here in Passaic County, New Jersey, have been called upon to face. It has not been the popular job of expanding our acreage or of enlarging our marketing area but a fight to HOLD the market that our growers have enjoyed for generations.

It is well to consider that for years and years the consumers in this metropolitan area depended almost entirely on our gardeners with their intensive small farms at the edge of the cities, and oftentimes right in the city, for practically all of their supplies of fresh or green vegetables, and the entire market gardening industry was developed in order to fill that demand for as many months of the year as possible. On account of it our men had to build greenhouses cold frames and hotbeds to take care of the early and the late crops normally out of season, and also use trenches and pits to store crops so that the season for those crops might be extended throughout the year.

This system made high revenues per acre under skillful management fairly easy to attain and thus a prosperous, progressive group of vegetable growers developed in and about our metropolitan cities.

Then came better transportation facilities, better packages, favorable freight rates and better organized marketing systems, "cutting in" (by using a local term) on our markets from the South and the West. As these shipped-in goods appeared in our markets, gradually but surely our growers' season has been cut down and also the demand for some of their crops has been entirely eliminated.

This process has been going on throughout the entire eighteen years that I have been a county agent here and we tried to meet the situation through change in production methods, increasing yields, better packages and all of those other devices that should enable us to meet competition, but during this time there grew up in our farmers' markets a speculator class who often posed as farmers but who purchased shipped-in goods that were scarce and thus took the cream out of our local markets. This class grew to such an extent that they became the favored class in our local privately owned markets apparently, and while these men appeared to prosper our growers found their incomes decreasing.

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These types of speculators who are really commission merchants without stores, demanded choice stands in our farmers' markets and often handled only the goods that they could make the most profit on, leaving the local produce dealer and grower with the problem of supplying to the retail dealers and consumers the other needed lines, which were all too often the unprofitable lines.

This, as you can imagine, brought a series of protests, petitions and ordinances from our growers and commission men, but all that failed to register on the market owners, and so our department was called upon to assist in solving this marketing problem, and when negotiations failed to get anywhere at the original market site a committee decided to move. So there we built in the City of Paterson, out of the heavy traffic area but adjacent to mail line railroad facilities and with direct super-highway connections to New York and Newark and right in the heart of the outlying metropolitan district, a produce market, owned, controlled and operated by farmers.

In this market only farmers may sell on our market square but in order to keep the industry together our growers provided that modern commission houses be built with railroad siding so that the entire demands of the consumers in this area could be met most efficiently.

So that the farmers of the Paterson area have built, with the help of the Bank for Cooperatives of the Farm Credit Administration and whatever advice we could give them, a centralized marketing place where they will always have an opportunity of marketing their goods direct to retailers in fresher condition and in competition with similar goods and with shipped-in goods classified as such. People desiring shipped-in goods in our seasons may secure them from our adjacent commission houses. This, coupled with a city ordinance prohibiting wholesale peddling in the streets, gives the local grower an opportunity of holding his market and providing a centralized marketing area, free from traffic congestion, absolutely modern and sanitary and in which both buyer and seller can operate more efficiently. Market fees and rents are low, profits are limited by law, the entire industry is together, and through a more efficient cooperative tie-up the consumers in this area will not be called upon to pay a lot of surplus handling charges in every package of food they buy. Truly a shorter route and a more efficient one from farm to consumer.

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